

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 18079

CALCUTTA 3116 FOLLOWS . SENT TO NEW DELHI FOR ACTION ON 15 DEC 76.
BEING RPT FOR YOUR INFO.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 3116

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: POLITICAL CONTEST IN WEST BENGAL

1. POLITICAL INFIGHTING IN WEST BENGAL REMAINS INTENSE.
ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, LITTLE WORK IS GOING ON IN
WRITERS' BUILDINGS--OFFICES OF STATE GOVERNMENT--AS
MINISTERS AND MLA'S CONFER OVER POLITICAL SITUATION. A
STATEMENT WAS REPORTEDLY BEING DRAFTED ON DECEMBER 14
BY MINISTERS AND CONGRESS OFFICIALS CALLING FOR CHANGE
IN STATE ADMINISTRATION IN ORDER TO IMPLEMENT 20-POINT
PROGRAM OF MRS. GANDHI AND 5-POINT PROGRAM OF SANJAY.
ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA COMPRES SCENE TO LAST DAYS OF
UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT IN 1967, WHEN SECRET MEETINGS
WERE TAKING PLACE IN MINISTERS' OFFICES, WHEN MLA'S
WERE ENGAGED IN "HECTIC ACTIVITY," AND REPORTERS AND
OFFICERS WERE MAKING "EARNEST INQUIRIES" AS TO WHAT
WOULD HAPPEN.

2. ON THEIR SIDE, SUPPORTERS OF RAY TURNED FAREWELL
MEETING OF RETIRING CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY VICE-CHANCELLOR
S.N. SEN ON DECEMBER 14 INTO RALLY IN FAVOR OF RAY'S
RETENTION. ONE SPEAKER IS QUOTED IN AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA
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AS CALLING ON STUDENTS AND YOUTH "TO MOBILIZE THEMSELVES

AGAINST THE 'REACTIONARIES BACKED BY SOME INDUSTRIAL-ISTS WHO WERE OUT TO BRING ABOUT POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN WEST BENGAL.'" PRO-RAY SPEAKER ALSO QUOTED AS DECLARING THAT "ANY ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE PRESIDENT'S RULE WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTED BY THE PEOPLE OF WEST BENGAL." LAKSHMI KANTA BOSE IS QUOTED IN ANANDA BAZAR AS HAVING SAID AT SAME MEETING THAT ANTI-RAY FORCES HAVE TRIED TO BUY OFF SEVEN MLA'S WHO HAD SIGNED A STATEMENT AGAINST A CHANGE IN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION. BOSE REPORTEDLY SAID, "REMEMBER, THIS IS NEITHER BIHAR NOR ORISSA; THIS IS WEST BENGAL." AMONG OTHER SPEAKERS AT MEETING WAS PANKAJ BANERJEE, GENERAL SECRETARY, ALL-INDIA YOUTH CONGRESS, THE LATEST IMPORTANT CONVERT TO THE PRO-RAY FORCES.

3. AS OBSERVERS NOW SEE THE SITUATION, RAY NOW HAS THE SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF WEST BENGAL MLA'S, BUT MUCH OF HIS CABINET IS PUBLICLY ALIGNED AGAINST HIM. THUS NEITHER RAY'S CONTINUATION IN OFFICE NOR HIS REPLACEMENT BY ANOTHER CHIEF MINISTER IS A VIABLE SOLUTION. THE ONLY REALISTIC CHOICE IS THE IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE, BUT ACCORDING TO SOME, THE CENTER FEARS THAT THIS MIGHT LEAD TO DEMONSTRATIONS AND SERIOUS DISRUPTION. TO AVOID THIS POSSIBILITY, MRS. GANDHI IS SAID TO WANT RAY TO GO PEACEFULLY, AND TO ACCEPT SOME SENIOR POSITION OUTSIDE WEST BENGAL--EITHER IN DELHI OR AS HIGH COMMISSIONER IN LONDON. IF HE REMAINS IN CALCUTTA, SHE REPORTEDLY FEARS THAT AN OPPOSITION GROUP WOULD COALESCE AROUND HIM. RAY'S UNWILLINGNESS TO LEAVE IN THIS MANNER IS SAID TO BE CAUSING THE LONG DRAWN-OUT STRUGGLE.
LIEBOWITZ

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